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Standard language models, variable lingua franca goals: How can ELF-aware teacher education square the circle?

Modelos lingüísticos estándares, objetivos variables de lengua franca: ¿cómo se cuadra el círculo en una educación sensibilizada al inglés como lengua franca del profesorado de lengua inglesa?

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Abstract: Sceptical attitudes towards the relevance of ELF research for language pedagogy and teacher education are prevalent and well-documented. Some of this resistance may result from a misunderstanding of key concepts and arguments, some from practical concerns and context-specific factors such as syllabus and assessment frameworks. A significant difficulty in persuading ELT practitioners to adopt or recognise ELF positions is the apparent conflict between preferences for standard language models and the reality of variable lingua franca goals for learning and use. ELF potentially changes everything, yet is a phenomenon grounded in unchanging social fundamentals of language use. This article reports on part of a continuing study into the impact of ELF perspectives on experienced language teachers, with a focus on their attitudes and levels of awareness in relation to their professional development and contexts. How teachers are enabled and encouraged to overcome potential scepticism, and reconcile the perceived conflict between standard models and lingua franca goals in their practice, is crucial to the spread of a more appropriate, “ELF-aware” form of language teacher education. Responses are mixed, but generally insightful and engaged, even when expressing reservations or doubt. There is also some good news, with clear evidence that attitudes can be influenced, through exposure to ideas, reflection and motivation towards action.

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Resumen: La prevalencia de actitudes escépticas hacia la relevancia de la investigación en el ámbito de inglés como lengua franca para la pedagogía del inglés y la educación del profesorado ha sido bien documentada. Parte de este rechazo puede ser el resultado de malentendidos entorno a conceptos claves y argumentos, y por otra parte puede ser fruto de consideraciones prácticas y específicas de cada contexto relacionadas con los programas didácticos y marcos de evaluación. Un impedimento significativo a la hora de convencer a los docentes que deben adoptar o reconocer las posturas planteadas por ILF es el aparente conflicto entre la preferencia por modelos estándares de lengua y la realidad de los objetivos variables de la lengua franca en cuanto al uso y el aprendizaje del idioma. ILF puede desestabilizar todo el terreno, pero es un fenómeno arraigado en los fundamentos sociales del uso del lenguaje. Este artículo presenta parte de una investigación en desarrollo sobre el efecto de las perspectivas de ILF sobre el un profesorado de inglés experto, enfocando en particular sus actitudes y conocimientos en relación a sus propios ámbitos y desarrollo profesionales. Es imprescindible entender cómo se logra superar el posible escepticismo y reconciliar el conflicto percibido entre los modelos normalizados y los objetivos prácticos de la lengua franca para el profesorado, para así fomentar un desarrollo profesional más apropiado y sensibilizado al ILF. Las respuestas han sido variadas pero siempre lúcidas y comprometidas, aun cuando se expresan reservas o dudas. También se perciben buenas noticias con claras indicaciones de que las actitudes se pueden modificar a través de un encuentro con ideas, la reflexión profesional y una motivación hacia la acción.

Palabras clave: inglés como lengua franca (ILF), formación profesorado, enseñanza de la lengua inglesa (ELI), pedagogía de lengua, modelos estándares de lengua

1 Introduction

There are arguably signs of growing awareness of the influence of ELF research and ideas on English Language Teaching (ELT) (see e.g. Alsagoff et al. 2012; Galloway and Rose 2015; Matsuda 2012; Sewell 2013). Even some mainstream text books (e.g. Harmer 2015) have begun to recognise the existence and relevance of firstly World Englishes, then English as an International Language, and more recently ELF perspectives. However, the lack of critical attention to ELF

and intercultural communication has been identified as a significant “blind spot” in ELT (Baker 2015: 27). ELF potentially changes everything, yet is a phenomenon grounded in unchanging social fundamentals of language use. Questions regarding the basis of standard languages, communicative norms, appropriate pedagogical models and learning goals are being raised, and need addressing. ELT, in its myriad global and local settings, and language teacher education, cannot ignore the sociolinguistic realities of ELF use (Seidlhofer 2011; Dewey 2012; Sifakis 2014). Notions of competence, intelligibility, knowledge and skills are being revisited, and teaching redirected towards developing what is most required by learners/users of ELF, as appropriate to their communicative purposes. Or are they? In fact, arguably pedagogic principles and practice are still largely unaffected by academic discourses on language change, intercultural awareness and lingua franca use. Moving from awareness through reflection towards application of new ideas is perhaps easier said than done.

This paper draws on findings from a continuing study of English language teacher development, mostly within UK higher education, but with reference to diverse ELT contexts. It explores the impact of ELF research and related concepts on experienced teachers, in terms of their professional identities and sense of expertise. The focus is on their level of awareness and the potential for application to pedagogic practice. How they and other practitioners can reconcile perceived tensions between standard language learning models and variable lingua franca communicative goals is key to acceptance of more appropriate, “ELF-aware” forms of teaching and teacher education. The extent to which teachers engage with ELF perspectives is therefore central to a reimagined basis for language pedagogy. Responses are mixed but generally insightful, even when expressing reservations or scepticism. There is also some good news, with clear evidence that attitudes can be influenced through exposure to ideas, reflection and motivation towards action: seeing the world through “ELF-tinted spectacles”, as one participant memorably put it:

On my first day of the MA in English Language Teaching I said to the programme convenor that one of my aims for living in Britain for two years was to sound more British. He replied “I think you might change your mind on that one”. I was puzzled by this, but his comment stayed with me. Through exposure to the English as a lingua franca literature, my curiosity towards this field of research grew as the issues challenged some of my previous perceptions of language learning and teaching. Simultaneously these new perspectives resonated with some of my deeper beliefs about identity and multiculturalism, as well as with my perspectives of myself as a multilingual. It was almost as if I had acquired a new set of spectacles, ELF-tinted spectacles that allowed me to see language learning in a new light. As if the narrow area that had previously been my focal point was now surrounded by a much larger field of vision, making a very different picture emerge in front of my eyes. And the logical question that followed was: “What could I do with this new insight?” (Teacher C; written comment)

2 Standards, norms, models and goals

The discussion of standards, norms, models and goals goes back a long way (e.g. Dalton and Seidlhofer 1994; Jenkins 1998 relevant to ELF; and much further back in Applied Linguistics), particularly in relation to the teaching of grammar and pronunciation. The following summary of the definitions provided in dictionaries familiar to both language teachers and general users offers some guidance on how these terms are understood and often conflated in academic and popular discourse:

Standard: a level of quality; a pattern or model that is generally accepted; the variety of a language which has the highest status in a community and usually based on the speech and writing of educated native speakers.

Norm: that which is regarded as normal or typical; an accepted standard or a way of behaving; considered appropriate in speech or writing for a particular situation or purpose within a particular group or community.

Model: a simplified representation used to explain the workings of a real world system or event; a successful example to be copied, with or without modifications; someone or something used as a standard or goal for the learner, e.g. the pronunciation of an educated native speaker.

Goal: a result that one is attempting to achieve; an aim or purpose.

(*Cambridge Dictionary Online/Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*)

It requires only minimal analysis of the above definitions to see the problems linguists and teachers might encounter when trying to interpret these concepts. However, for present purposes it is the particular relevance to lingua franca communication and pedagogy that matters. The crucial question from practitioners to researchers is “how can we reconcile two apparently conflicting ideas: standard models versus variable goals?” By this, what is usually meant is how can the pervasive and influential use of established “standard” forms of a named language (i.e. “English”) assist learners to achieve their (often lingua franca) communicative goals (i.e. “ELF”)? There are echoes of the “single monochrome standard” (Quirk 1985: 6) set against multiple polychrome goals and interactions. Leung argues that received wisdom in ELT, as witnessed in textbooks, tests and assessment frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), is a “settled view of communicative competence,” seen as a “stable phenomenon and a repertoire that can be specified in advance” (Leung 2013: 295) and based on native speaker norms. In contrast, in typical ELF communication these norms and conventions often do not apply, with meaning being negotiated in a fluid and contingent manner (Leung 2013: 296).

If we accept Widdowson's (2012: 19) argument that "native" norms create a construct that is largely irrelevant for ELF communication (a "convenient fiction"), we need to address both the fiction and the convenience. We must accept that identifiable standards and models are familiar and useful for both teachers and learners, and that language use and learning goals are variable and contextual. It is part of the job of teacher education to square this circle, by developing a critical language awareness in prospective and experienced teachers (see Dewey 2014 on "pedagogic criticality"). Particular attention should be given to awareness of ELF, of language variation and change more broadly, and of standards, norms and alternatives (see Sifakis 2014). Swan, responding to Widdowson, counters that ELF research should "retain a sense of realism," referring to the problematic difference between changing attitudes towards teaching and changing its content, noting that: "Whatever the realities of ELF use, learners need clear and consistent learning models" (Swan 2012: 384). Swan also asserts that traditional models "are not targets [...], but they are needed" (Swan 2013: 393), recognising the key distinction from goals, so often overlooked through conflation and pedagogical habit.

Sewell, writing for an EFL/ELT audience, claims that "adopting an ELF perspective on teaching does not mean that norms and standards are no longer required, but that these are mutable concepts" (Sewell 2013: 7); therefore learners should be "introduced to language variation as soon as they are ready" (Sewell 2013: 7). In terms of teaching and teacher education, the challenge is to "theorize and implement approaches that acknowledge the variability of language while still making it accessible and acceptable for actual contexts, classrooms and learners" (Sewell 2013: 9). This is very much the challenge for those hoping to achieve wider acceptance for ELF-aware teacher education.

3 Previous studies on ELF and teacher education

If we wish to see the application of findings from ELF research to language teaching practice, it seems clear that teacher education is key, but questions remain concerning when it is most effective (initial or in-service), and how explicit it needs to be. Other work in this area (e.g. Blair 2015) suggests that multilingual, well-trained teachers with intercultural competence are essential to the proposed rethinking of how languages, and English in particular, are taught and learnt. There are risks of "ELF evangelism," however, as is common with many ideas seen as innovative, questioning existing beliefs and practice. Advocates of change must get beyond preaching to the converted, and perhaps

avoid preaching to those who practice. Illés (2016) cautions us against the “missionary zeal” often associated with innovation in ELT. On the other hand, “ELF ambassadors” in the right positions can influence changes in attitudes, some of which may lead to what could be termed “ELF-aware” pedagogy. It appears that concepts such as ELF, intercultural (communicative) competence, language as a social practice – even language change itself (there are many language change deniers) – present serious challenges to teachers (see e.g. Dewey 2012 on normativity), and arguably to learners. Perhaps in many minds there is still too much focus on the “E,” rather than the “LF,” on “flawed variety” rather than pragmatic function (Widdowson 2013: 8, Widdowson 2015: 368), particularly if we consider the implications of multilingualism (see e.g. Jenkins 2015), communication technologies and social media, and the expression of complex, dynamic identities through lingua franca interactions.

Issues emerging from designing and implementing forms of ELF-aware teacher education are explored thoroughly by Sifakis (2014), arguing for a transformative approach, aimed at moving beyond resistance to change, or a “gradual engagement” with ELF. Specific proposals are made for courses including guided reading on ELF and critical pedagogy texts, action research projects relevant to teachers’ contexts, changing mindsets and established practices. Vettorel (2016) reports on proposals for ELF-informed classroom practices based on a study of pre-service teachers, focusing on their understanding of the pluralisation of English and its implications. Jenkins et al. rightly call for teachers to “reassess practice in their own specific, situated teaching contexts” (Jenkins et al. 2011: 306) and to be the judges of what is appropriate in terms of implementing alternative approaches, but not all react positively. Some of the participants in the study outlined below indicated degrees of scepticism towards the notion of “transforming” their attitudes and beliefs. Sifakis and Bayyurt (2016) also refer to “supporters,” “risk-takers” and “sceptics” among their project participants. From attempts to develop our thinking and address these challenges for ELT, it appears there is a need for guidance, mentoring and support networks to effect real change in teachers’ practice. The question then becomes one of identifying and applying good ideas in an appropriate way to specific teaching and teacher education contexts.

Ellis (2009: 195–197) claimed that SLA topics presented on teacher education courses should consist of “ideas,” as opposed to theories or models, and teachers encouraged to undertake their own action research projects. This helps to make such ideas more relevant to practice through critical evaluation. The same principle applies to the “micro-innovation” proposed as part of ELF-aware transformative learning (Bayyurt and Sifakis 2015), and the application of “ELF ideas” here. Practitioners may ask what this ELF-

informed pedagogy should look like: what are the learning goals implied by notions such as “beyond-native” competence for lingua franca communicative purposes or the “post-EFL paradigm” (Bayyurt and Sifakis 2015)? There is a persistent conflation of models and goals, as noted above, where strongly held beliefs and adherence to “native” models (often seen as the only desirable or viable option) are at odds with actual goals for learning and use. Kohn (2015) argues for a “weak orientation” towards Standard English, embedded within a social constructivist perspective on language, as the basis for creating a “pedagogical space” for ELF in the classroom. This can be the “simplified representation used to explain the workings of a real world system” (■: ■), part of our definition of “model” noted above. If we develop this stance, we have to consider how teacher education courses can reflect such views of learning, SLA and lingua franca-based intercultural communication. In addition, teachers need to be prepared and developed to enable their students to communicate based on their own agency and interpretation (see e.g. Johnson 2006 on sociocultural approaches to teacher education). There may be differing opinions on the need for revolutionary change, rather than simply waiting for the effects of evolution, but the role of teacher education in bringing about either is surely influential, and worth investigating.

4 Study focus

The study reported on briefly below is part of a continuing exploration of the impact and awareness of ELF-related ideas among English language teachers, mostly during postgraduate courses and beyond. The present focus can be summarised through the following research questions:

- What levels of awareness of ELF ideas and perspectives do experienced English language teachers have?
- How is this awareness developed through explicit (and implicit) content on a teacher education course (such as a Masters in ELT/TESOL)?
- What are experienced teachers’ views on the relevance and feasibility of applying ELF ideas to their classroom practice?

The participants were experienced teachers (at least five years into their careers), including a mixture of L1 and L2 English speakers. For the purposes of the study, “nativeness” is not seen as a central construct, though inevitably the conventional labels were sometimes employed by participants, usually with recognition

of their contested nature. They were all approaching the end of their postgraduate course, and had taken specific modules or chosen dissertation topics related to ELF. This content included explicit focus on ELF and reading texts in the modules “Second Language Acquisition” and “Principles and Practice in ELT,” as well as (for some) in an option “World Englishes” (the name of which perhaps also needs reviewing). However, the nature of the course is language teacher education, not primarily research, so the process of integrating “ELF ideas” is one of steady revision of content and approach, constantly under review (see Blair 2015 for more detail on this aspect). It is important to note here that, for this reason and for those of practicality, the design of the study could not directly capture participants’ levels of ELF awareness at the start of their course. The aim was to elicit their own perspectives on how their views and responses had changed over the period of study; hence the research questions above. This is an aspect of the project which could usefully be revised in any future or follow-up studies.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the prime instrument for seeking data. These were audio-recorded and transcribed, and in some cases followed up through e-mail contact; some participants also produced written assignments and online forum comments in relation to topics covered. The research approach was essentially naturalistic, positioning “people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings, as the primary data sources” (Mason 2002: 56). The interviews were designed to be responsive (Rubin and Rubin 2005), aimed at eliciting and exploring teachers’ views on the issues in terms of their own lived experience. The discussions included, for instance, reasons for and possible solutions to scepticism concerning accepting and applying ELF ideas in practice, and the potential impact of such ideas on their own teacher development. Participants were also asked to make suggestions for future change in initial and in-service teacher education in the contexts they are familiar with, and in some cases they are (or will be) in positions of power and influence within ELT (potentially “supporters,” in the terms used by Bayyurt and Sifakis 2015).

Teachers were selected purposefully as being professionally engaged and aware of the complexities of language and ELT in diverse contexts. Thus they could also become ideal “ELF ambassadors” occupying influential roles, as noted above. As Widdowson reminds us, “the first step is to raise the awareness of teachers that there is an alternative way of thinking about the subject they teach, based on an understanding of English as a lingua franca” (Widdowson 2012: 24). The second step, arguably more difficult, is moving from awareness to application and action, and this is a central concern for the present and future studies.

5 Teacher data: Discussion

Discussed below are selected comments from participants (referred to for simplicity as Teacher A, etc.), which give a flavour of their perspectives on the main questions. Reasonably full quotations from the data are included to allow a degree of clarity and “voice” to emerge (taken from both interviews and written texts/posts). There are examples of growing awareness of ELF and more broadly sociolinguistic views of language and pedagogy; but also arguably cases of conflicting beliefs, confusion and a limited capacity to both process and apply what are seen as challenging ideas for language teaching in context-specific practice. The responses are discussed thematically in relation to the three focusing questions noted above, and to relevant literature where it appears that there is a clear link to course reading texts.

5.1 Standards, models and ELF

Several teachers made interesting comments on how they see standards and pedagogical models, with some illustrative use of metaphor in attempts to explain their position:

So, for me, Standard language, I still use it, but as a model – it’s something to explore, but I see it as not a complete system anymore. I see it more hollow, it’s like a shape, and the students can sort of step into that and try and make it their own. [...] But I don’t necessarily see that as the end goal. I think that their ability to communicate, and transmit messages, and succeed socially, is where the language is taking place. [...] Again, I suppose it would be a case of using models, but not having that model be the ultimate goal, that they have to recreate this, but more like clothes that they can put on or step into, and use. (Teacher A; interview)

The description of a “hollow” model, which learners can “step into” and make their own, along with “clothes they can put on” and use, may appear rather impressionistic, but these views also share common ground with what Kohn (2015) referred to as the “My English condition”: arguably this teacher is in fact taking a “weak orientation” towards standard English as a way to reach ELF goals. Indeed, he also claimed that (some, UK-based) teachers lacked the awareness shown by some of their learners:

The teachers aren’t aware of it [impact of ELF etc.], at least from my experience ... they weren’t aware of it to the same degree the students are. I remember posting something on Facebook, and then posting the responses from the students, about how they felt about ELF, and for most of the teachers they don’t really give it a consideration because they are

in England ... and they're teaching English in England. So for them, it sort of stops at the border of England. (Teacher A; interview)

Some participants have clearly thought in detail about what ELF means to them, and its aspirational roles in global communication:

ELF suggests change and considering English as a “malleable” sort of English in which people adapt, change and adjust it according to their purposes, not only learners but also teachers. ELF is on a global scale to be able to take communication to transcend borders, nationalities and cultures. (Teacher F; written comment)

Another teacher expressed concern at the limits of her role and responsibility for developing a more critical understanding of language and lingua franca communication, something which “almost extends beyond the remit of what an English language teacher is”. She also worried about models and her own competence with alternatives to the norms of current practice (echoing Swan 2013 here):

There needs to be a model, we've got to sell them a model ... I just struggle with if we have another model to teach them, what is that model? How do we define that model? Who's deciding what that model is? And how am I in a position to teach that model? How can I be pushing this model which I personally don't have any experience of ... ? (Teacher B; interview)

Others took a more optimistic line, rethinking success in terms of the skills learners require in context, taking a “glass half-full” approach to what can be achieved:

The context will determine how you use English, and that's what we need to teach our students, that English is a language that's used in so many different ways, depending on the contexts. So basically, a lot of the skills are understanding the context and understanding what is important and relevant here. [...] I don't have to think of myself as a failure – look at all the things I can do in English, wow, and just getting to look at yourself in a different view. I have felt that, and I think for my students too, if you tell them that if you don't sound particularly British or American, that doesn't need to be a measure of success. How well you communicate in these situations, and if that's the measure of success it's something more attainable. (Teacher C; interview)

This same teacher showed a high level of sensitivity towards applying ELF ideas to pedagogy concerning the choice of models and attaining goals, especially regarding listening skills (versus production), accommodation and identity. She has read widely on ELF and related literature, and has clearly absorbed many of the ideas and reflected on their relevance to her own professional context as teacher and trainer (e.g. Kirkpatrick 2007; on the teacher as the target; Kohn 2015; on “My English”):

One thing is the receptive understanding, that we are going to be in all these contexts, and we need to understand all these accents. The other is how you're going to choose to speak. I think we need to teach our students to accommodate to who they speak to, at the same time there needs to be a "Your English" in a way, which is your basic core English that you can stray away from depending on the situation ... a repertoire. You make a choice, and that's one of the things I want to say to my students, is that you have the choice. [...] Stop feeling embarrassed, be proud of all the stuff you can do in English, and tell your students "My English is a result of all these experiences, and I can use it well, and this is the model that I'm going to be for you". (Teacher C; interview)

It's also this thing of identity, which I hadn't really thought of, the fact that I can have my own identity in English. It's part of who I am ... the sense of belonging, of being from somewhere is important. So when I'm speaking English, can I also have an identity and be proud of that, being [an L2] English speaker? [...] Actually being a real English user, that English isn't their language, it's our language. I think that's a very different, very new way of looking at it. (Teacher C; interview)

This is the teacher who confessed to wearing "ELF-tinted spectacles", and whose positive adoption (and adaptation) of ELF ideas is returned to below. More sceptical views on the challenges implicit in applying a greater level of ELF awareness, and possible responses, emerge in the following section.

5.2 Challenges, awareness and responses

An example of the rather mixed picture emerging from teachers is illustrated below, responding to a question on scepticism towards ELF, where the theme of models and goals is maintained, along with doubts and uncertainty:

I think that, like so many others, teachers feel comfortable within their comfort zone. If you have an excellent grasp of correct grammar and pronunciation, why would you suddenly change your teaching style, and what would this change mean to the identities of the teacher? I am arguing for the relationship between many non-native speakers' English variety and their social identity, so why should there not be such a link for English language teachers? [...] The ELF monster seems huge! (Teacher E; written comment)

Here we see high-level awareness of complexity in terms of identities, language use and teachers' reluctance to move beyond their comfort zone; yet also reference to "correctness" and an implied (problematic) link between applying a different pedagogical approach and notions of teacher competence. This participant also explicitly mentioned that his attitudes had changed during the course, and that the focus on "correct" pronunciation, for example, came from his educational background and training. Recent interest in topics such as

variation, identity and cultural understanding has not entirely removed this set of assumptions regarding standards and pedagogical models. The humorous yet sincere “ELF monster” comment arguably reveals a more serious tension created by the phenomenon: hard to ignore but still a bit scary.

Others make a more explicit connection between ELF thinking and ELT, displaying critical awareness, in conjunction with the clearly stated desire for an effective pedagogical model:

Here lies a problem with ELF as a new way of thinking about teaching EFL. Since [...] by its very nature it is a fluid phenomenon undergoing what Jenkins et al. (2011) might call a process of regularisation, how can it be approached pedagogically unless these “regularities” are codified in some way? [...] Can we as teachers help learners to achieve intelligibility in the contexts they require it for if we don’t have an appropriate model to work from? However, there is resistance amongst many ELF academics to the concept of codification, who argue that the fluidity and creativity of ELF is one of its greatest assets. [...] How can the research then be applied in practice? (Teacher G; written comment)

ELF researchers may again argue that the notion of “regularisation” is a misconception of how the field is revealing the nature of lingua franca communication, but this apparent paradox of recognising fluidity whilst also craving stability remains influential. Such comments also suggest that many teachers’ perceptions of ELF are strongly influenced by the notion of variety (as opposed to variability). The same teacher observed that the growth of academic interest in ELF had potential to inform ELT through promoting “a more pluralist agenda”, helping to shift the focus away from “the rigidity of pushing all learners towards a standardised norm”.

An illustration of the reasonably sophisticated thinking behind some of the responses can be seen with the following statement, linking identity to language models and research:

Another obstacle to the acceptance of any change in teaching methodology to incorporate ELF is the perceived threat to NS teachers’ sense of identity – that of the expert English speaker. No matter how open they may be to the concept of ELF, their attitude and attachment to British or American English is likely to be deeply ingrained [...] At the end of the day, teachers may also feel that in their busy lives, there is not any time for engaging with research which they may also feel is not relevant to their situation. (Teacher G; written comment)

Two points of interest are raised here: “native” expertise perceived as under threat from ELF perspectives, and the more routine issue of lack of time contributing to a sense of disconnection between teachers and research of any kind (as noted by others, including Ellis 2009; Borg 2009). Another teacher alludes to the very real obstacles to change in approach:

While recent research into ELF indicates a need for the teaching profession to reassess its attitudes towards teaching and testing, little has changed in practical terms. [...] ELF may continue to be regarded by some learners as a second-class model which does not quite match up to the standard of English they feel they should be aspiring to. At the same time, unless there are significant changes in teacher training and the requirements of examination boards, I feel that teachers will continue to believe that Standard English is the variety they should be teaching. (Teacher H; written comment)

A different participant expresses the centrality of teacher education, as well as its limitations:

It's consciousness-raising again, it's raising awareness and even if that is only half the battle, then you've given the teacher the tools to go about and learn for themselves, and part of this is you can't train someone to do this. You can't give them all the necessary skills or tools – you give them some of the core ideas, give them some of the basic tools, and then leave them to go and explore themselves. [...] And I think it's this kind of exploratory ... awareness that you need to foster in learners and teachers, and everyone else involved. But it's an ongoing process that will never stop. It's their responsibility too, it's their trainers' responsibility to get them started on that journey, but then it's theirs to continue. (Teacher I; interview)

So, raising awareness – yes, but beyond that it seems to become more an individual teacher's responsibility to adapt and respond to ELF-inspired perspectives on practice, as with other aspects of professional development. However, the same teacher disliked the term “awareness”: “you can be aware, but then what if you're not acting on that awareness; you can go ‘oh yeah, I'm aware of that, but I don't care about it’”.

Despite perceiving “awareness” as insufficient, this participant concluded with an interesting metaphorical description of what might be achievable through teacher education:

You can't force it upon them. But I think it's about asking these questions, and hoping that you do get a bit of a penny-drop situation, where they realise that perhaps they're not considering the big picture, or they're not doing everything they could be doing. You can kind of convert people to the cause, just by pressure alone. [...] I don't think it's one “penny-drop” situation, but there's multiple pennies dropping in different contexts, many different times. [...] It's still very gradual, and I think you still have a hard time shaking off the habitual, in that you might have developed the awareness – and this is where it's not just half the battle, because there is that ongoing development through your teaching practice. (Teacher I; interview)

Here we have evidence of a more evolutionary view of change in attitudes and practice, though also reference again to the “battle” involved. Arguably the evangelical risks in attempting to “convert people” to a cause, however important it seems to its adherents, can be another source of scepticism. It seems clear

that this participant at least has a realistic sense of the complexity involved for language teachers:

They have to be more accepting of the fact that there's much more variation involved, and their role is less distinct. [...] I think if people don't have that curiosity to then go and work at it themselves, and question themselves, analyse their own teaching practices and think about it, then it's not going to go much further, even if you've got the beginning of the consciousness-raising process. (Teacher I; interview)

The above observations, coming from a fairly well-informed and sympathetic teacher with experience in several countries, present both a perceptive analysis and perhaps the key challenge for teacher education when it comes to promoting ELF ideas to the profession.

Other participants reflected on the problems of pedagogical application in their specific working contexts, highlighting the potentially unsettling effect of newly found perspectives gained from their MA studies:

I think it's more in the foreground now than it was. Going back into this position and language school with this new knowledge, makes me feel a bit uncomfortable actually, because I don't think that the resources we have in the school for these students are adequate. And I don't think that my colleagues have the same level of awareness on this that I now have – or maybe they have it somewhere but they just can't be bothered to do anything about it, because it's easier not to. I certainly think that there needs to be more teacher development, a greater recognition that this is something that affects what we do on a daily basis, and we need to think about it and think about how we're going to adapt to that ... and as I said, I don't think that exists now. (Teacher D; interview)

So, degrees of awareness are in evidence, but implementing real change in practice is perhaps not as straightforward:

There is a bigger world out there, but I'm not exactly sure how this filters on to staff. How do I pass that on to people? ... Whilst I might be aware of the bigger picture now, but I'm still not sure in reality how this is going to play out. So I don't think it's necessarily going to change anything massively about what I was doing before. I think it just gives me a little bit of food for thought ... (Teacher B; interview)

Our participant with the “ELF-tinted spectacles” also had reservations, articulated with reference to many teachers' experience, sense of competence and identity, yet closing on a hopeful note for the future, albeit with slightly evangelical undertones:

I think it's a barrier in terms of these teachers being so set in this [NS model] being the target. It was the target that they had, and they accomplished, and ... it's giving up on a lot of their hard work and what they've said, and to really go on a different train. [...] And then with this introduction to this whole new way of looking at things [ELF etc.], it's like “oh my

God, it's a different route, and it makes much more sense to me". And maybe in my naivety I think if other people get to see this, they will also understand it. (Teacher C; interview)

On being reminded of the potential for the zeal of the recent convert to elicit a negative reaction from others, she was both aware and yet unrepentant:

Maybe that is so ... [laughs] being so evangelical, having "seen the light" ... almost, when you see it this way, how can it be any other way? It does feel a little bit like that, like "how can you go back?" It's almost impossible, like now that you know the world is round, how could you ever think it was flat? (Teacher C; interview)

5.3 Progress and implementation

As exemplified in the comments above, language teachers and educators can be viewed as the seed bed of future change in practice (Blair 2015), in terms of creating awareness and confidence with alternative ideas and approaches. However difficult it may appear to shift attitudes, some can be influenced, and the participants in this study provided evidence of this; arguably they are case studies in success, in terms of enhanced awareness and motivation towards practical change. One example relates to Continuing Professional Development (CPD):

The MA course has had a big, big impact on me ... At the school where I work, of course, that's something I want to implement, in terms of CPD sessions. It's a case of finding out what the teachers understand by teaching, and communicative teaching, and how they use the course book, and that will give me an understanding of the way they work, within the school. And say "let's look at this a different way", and that could be destabilising, and it's one of the things I'm most worried about, is destabilising the teachers there. (Teacher A; interview)

This teacher is now Director of Studies at a language school, and in addition to introducing the CPD sessions mentioned, has since supported three members of staff in studying on the MA programme.

It is clear that some of the participants have reflected critically on the impact of ELF on teacher education and broader contexts, appealing for significant change in approaches to both initial training and in-service development, and recognising the time required:

It needs to happen on two levels ... on new teacher training, to get access to this kind of thinking, and this way of looking at language. You can't just have a little module called World Englishes, saying this is one way of looking at language, but all the rest of our courses are RP and General American, and British and American culture, then it doesn't work. Because it becomes a side issue, it's one interesting aspect, along with grammar teaching and ... it's like a separate little box. It needs to inform the whole way of the course

being structured. [...] But of course that takes time to grow, up through the system, so you need to have a parallel, of reaching current teachers. But who's going to spearhead it, how's it going to happen? Maybe it's going to trickle in. There needs to be enough people who want to get the ball rolling. (Teacher C; interview)

This teacher also referred to planned national assessment criteria revisions in her home country highlighting once more the impact of standards on models and goals:

But when it comes in, then it's crucial in my opinion that these assessment criteria incorporate these [ELF] perspectives, that they don't say you need to have a native speaker accent or whatever. Because if that comes in now, then you'll take a long time to change ... that would be a real hindrance. [...] If the criteria say you need to have native speaker proficiency, or near native speaker proficiency, then teachers are going to be limited by that. (Teacher C; interview)

Broader challenges, which for reasons of space fall largely outside the scope of the present study, identified by this group of teachers included insufficient time and focus on short, pre-service training courses to incorporate new ideas on the nature of language (echoed in Dewey 2015). The long shadow of testing and assessment was highlighted (as noted by Teacher C above), with NS-based systems and standards in need of fundamental overhaul. Others reflected on both the desire for and the impossibility of an “internationally recognised variety” as a pedagogic model (e.g. for dictionaries). In addition, participants had concerns about the diversity of global English contexts, publishers' resistance to changing course books, and teachers themselves displaying resistance or lack of motivation towards changing their approach, often reinforced by institutional pressure or policy.

To an extent, variable learner goals and the communicative prevalence of ELF use may be recognised by both teachers and learners, but as one participant asked: “how do you start”? One teacher mentioned the need for a “two-pronged approach”, involving formal teacher training plus in-service development and support from academic management. Another touched on issues of policy, management and the impact of both teachers and learners, expressed in terms of top-down and bottom-up pressure for change: “do you start at the bottom or start at the top?”

Teachers also made specific suggestions for change in ELT practice. Amongst these were more exposure for learners and teachers to authentic ELF or World Englishes material (of the kind proposed by Sifakis 2014, etc.), native and non-native teachers working together, and instigating changes to assessment procedures where practicable. Some noted the desirability of learning more about “cultural” aspects of language – rather vague, but seemingly

aimed at addressing a perceived lack of sociocultural dimensions to both language learning and teacher education. Indeed, it is important to stress that most of these experienced teachers had little or no awareness of ELF or broader sociolinguistic views of language from their early training, and exposure to such perspectives “would have been incredibly useful”, according to one.

This in turn raises questions on whether initial training is the right time and place, or is it more a priority for continuing development with greater experience and confidence? Seidlhofer (2015: 25–26) argues that teachers need a “sense of security” to act upon awareness, within a familiar pedagogic framework. Certainly, as we have observed, teachers themselves can be a barrier to change, and some may see ELF ideas as irrelevant, especially in early career stages. However, as demonstrated by some of the comments and reflections above, others are very responsive and see ELF and debates about competence, standards, models and goals as part of broader social perspective on language and learning. These issues and many of the questions raised in the selected data presented above form the basis for the concluding remarks which follow.

6 Conclusions: Moving from awareness to application

The above discussion indicates that there are indeed signs of growing ELF-awareness in some teachers: a degree of “engagement” (Dewey 2015), including reasonably sophisticated understanding of the issues in relation to practice. However, this is arguably limited in terms of critical depth, for example, sometimes referring to varieties of English and norms, rather than problematising the notions of intelligibility and lingua franca capability. It is also noticeable that there is no real distinction drawn by participants in terms of linguistic and communicative competence, nor is there sustained questioning of the potentially different implications for teaching comprehension or production skills (with the notable exception of Teacher C). Established standards and models are still perhaps more pertinent for teachers than the complexity of shifting communicative goals, and the inherent instability and fluidity of ELF remains challenging.

There is not much indication yet of moving from awareness to application in teaching contexts, even where people are broadly sympathetic to ELF ideas. Teachers tend to make rather vague and generalised suggestions for change, citing the limitations imposed by the usual suspects (syllabus, course books and testing, lack of time to engage with research) as both perceived and genuine

obstacles. One potential explanation for some of the resistance and negative attitudes (noted elsewhere, e.g. Blair 2015) is that they are typical of NS and “high-proficiency” NNS teachers with an investment in the pedagogical status quo. In terms of teacher education, it appears that general awareness-raising is not enough, as Sifakis (2014) and others have previously asserted, and that the specialist skills set (and mind set) required of “ELF-informed” teachers will depend on both focused and individually motivated teacher learning. As Illés also notes: “does raising confidence and self-awareness count as a major reorientation of teachers’ deep-rooted beliefs?” (Illés 2016: 141). Probably not, though it is potentially the pre-requisite first step on that road.

The postgraduate teacher education programme behind this study is not as structured or systematic, in terms of its mission to develop awareness, as those described by Hall et al. (2013) on the plurilithic nature of English, or Sifakis (2014) on ELF. It is not primarily a course in ELF, but it aspires towards instilling a greater level of critical language awareness and capacity for application of new ideas within contextualised ELT practice. Further studies could usefully focus on identifying teachers’ levels of awareness at the start of their course, and exploring which specific types of content and tasks can be used to develop this for practical implementation in their professional roles.

Questions remain about what more could be achieved, if the problematic shift from awareness to application highlighted here is to be seriously addressed. It is also worth pausing to consider what observable impact we might expect: if language teachers do indeed start to change their practice, what would this actually look like? In other words, how within their local reality and constraints do these ideas affect the day-to-day delivery of classroom teaching, use of pedagogic materials, and crucially areas such as testing and assessment, syllabus design, and the overarching question of setting meaningful learning goals? Researchers can argue that the practical implementation or adoption of new ideas is largely outside their control, or even outside their remit, but this is largely unacceptable to practitioners, it seems, and creates one of the barriers to innovation in education more broadly (see e.g. Ellis 2009 on SLA and pedagogy).

It is also interesting to note that some of the resistance to ELF in practice coming from experienced teachers echoes the kinds of responses often cited by *learners*, in viewing it as a “model” somehow deficient or unsuited to their purposes. There is a sense that what we might term “lingua franca competence” is not the learning goal they have in mind. Indeed, teachers in this study and elsewhere refer to the needs of their students, with demands for “native-like” models, as reasons for not radically changing their pedagogical approach. Here arguably the “weak Standard English orientation” proposed by Kohn (2015) has

some value, providing a facilitating bridge towards a more flexible yet ultimately ELF-aware position for ELT, and a step towards squaring that circle. The debates over the distracting conflation of models and goals, and the necessary unpicking of the problematic construct of “competence” (in learners *and* teachers) will continue beyond the scope of this paper. What is definitely within the scope of ELF-aware teacher education is the search for ways to build on what one of the participants here neatly characterised as the “penny-drop moments”, when ELF ideas start to make more pedagogical sense to those who wish to apply them in practice.

Perhaps a closing comment should be provided by our articulate and critically aware (“ELF-tinted glasses”-wearing) participant on users of English, their goals and their teachers:

Considering ELT through ELF glasses, the native speaker of English no longer remains the central point in the field of vision; a larger world of English language use emerges. Rather than leaving the pupils to gaze admiringly at the native speaker, ELT needs to give young people an adequate preparation for engaging with the world as competent multilingual users of English. Rather than mimicking NSs, they should be encouraged to appropriate the language in ways that best serve their own language needs. For this, every teacher educator, teacher and learner needs access to the insights offered by ELF research and literature. (Teacher C; written comment)

As teacher educators, it may be challenging to implement sound “ELF ideas.” This can create a tension, or a sense of frustration, at the apparently glacial pace of change, if such change is something we want to see and invest in during our professional lives. Many teachers justifiably claim to be too busy teaching to reflect critically on their own practice, to stay updated in terms of research and pedagogical innovation, and to apply new thinking to the way they perform their roles. Similarly, many teacher educators are in a position where their opportunities for extended research are also limited, or prescribed in some way, and the capacity to develop awareness and proposals for application in the courses they teach becomes constrained.

As a result of conducting this study, ideas are emerging for specific tasks or projects, as part of the teacher education programme. For instance, designing materials and activities appropriate to teachers’ own contexts, applying their own ELF-awareness and knowledge (as proposed by Sifakis and Bayyurt (2016: 150), with action research ideas and “micro-innovation”). This process is always “work-in-progress,” but no less significant for that. Reconciling standard language models and variable learning goals remains a circle that language teacher education needs to square, and perspectives gained from ELF research can support that aim. However, for some it is these same ELF perspectives that

arguably create the circle that needs to be squared, and so awareness may produce more questions than answers. For teachers and teacher educators, moving from awareness through reflection towards application is still easier said than done, and that movement takes time, continued effort and vision.

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Bionote

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